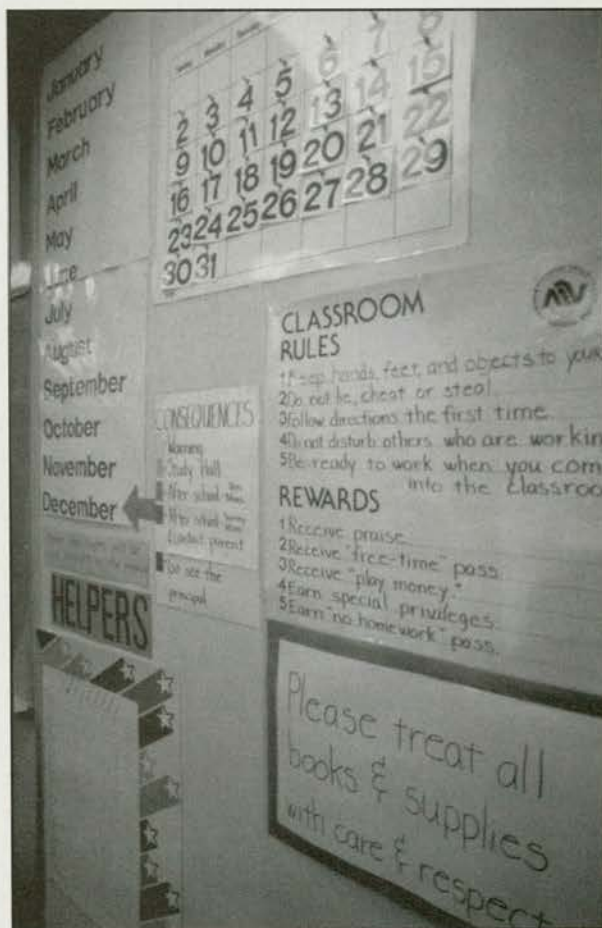


BEYOND ASSUMPTIONS

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE is an overwhelming concern for many of us—and not only because of the deadly violence that occasionally breaks out. For too many students and teachers, a daily, low-level nastiness and disorder turn schools from communities into obstacle courses or even combat zones. Of course, there are plenty of reports and position papers seeking to analyze and interpret the problem and propose solutions. It's surprising, then, that so much of what we believe about disorder in the schools—both effects and remedies—is based on untested assumptions.

That's where "Order in the Classroom: Violence, Discipline, and Student Achievement," a recent report from the Educational Testing Service, written by Paul E. Barton, Richard J. Coley, and Harold Wenglinsky, breaks new ground. In addition to discussing the prevalence of school disorder and talking about what policymakers are trying to do about the problem, it tests some of the assumptions about what works using longitudinal student data and information about policies in the schools the students attended. Some of the conclusions confirm what we already know, but others are a big surprise. And the report presents, for the first time, evidence supporting something that teachers have always known in their bones is true: the link between school disorder and student achievement.

The data that statistician Harold Wenglinsky uses come from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), a nationally representative sample of twenty-five thousand eighth-graders. NELS includes demographic information and information about students' disciplinary records, as well as scores from tests in mathematics, reading, social science, and science. At the same time as the student data were gathered, teachers and principals were questioned about school disciplinary policies and school size. NELS followed these students, surveying and testing them again in 1990 when they were sophomores and



in 1992 in their senior year in high school, so Wenglinsky is able to examine the relationship between student misbehavior, school policies, and student achievement. The study compares the delinquency and achievement levels of students in schools that employed a variety of disciplinary policies, from zero tolerance of gang activity to restricting student movements during the school day. In looking at the data, one needs to keep in mind that they do not include twelfth-graders who dropped out or transferred to other schools. This reduces the numbers by nearly one-half (from 25,000 to 13,626). As a result,

Wenglinsky notes, the group is somewhat atypical, and its members were probably less likely to be rule-breakers.

Student Delinquency

The data revealed two levels of "delinquency" (the word consistently used in the report). Relatively large numbers of students reported that they came late to class (73 percent), got "into trouble for breaking school rules" (42 percent), and cut or skipped class (34 percent). But relatively few broke rules that subjected them to severe penalties like out-of-school suspension (5 percent) or transfer for disciplinary reasons (1 percent). And students themselves distinguished between misbehavior they considered more or less acceptable and behavior that was beyond the pale: A relatively large number (29 percent) said that it was "sometimes" or "often" okay to be late to class or copy homework; 16 percent said the same thing about talking back to a teacher; but only 1 percent considered it acceptable to steal school property, use drugs in school, or "abuse" teachers.

Wenglinsky found considerable uniformity among

Table 1:
School Disciplinary Policies—Most Common Punishment

<i>Offense</i>	<i>Modal Punishment</i>	<i>Students in Schools That Invoke This Punishment</i>
Cheating—1st time	Detention	79%
Cheating—2nd time	Out-of-school suspension	58
Skiping class—1st time	Detention	55
Skiping class—2nd time	Out-of-school suspension	59
Skiping school—1st time	In-school suspension	60
Skiping school—2nd time	Out-of-school suspension	65
Injuring student—1st time	Out-of-school suspension	82
Injuring student—2nd time	Expulsion	60
Alcohol possession—1st time	Out-of-school suspension	79
Alcohol possession—2nd time	Expulsion	60
Drug possession—1st time	Out-of-school suspension	73
Drug possession—2nd time	Expulsion	76
Drug sale—1st time	Expulsion	72
Drug sale—2nd time	Expulsion	91
Weapons possession—1st time	Expulsion	64
Weapons possession—2nd time	Expulsion	90
Alcohol use in school—1st time	Out-of-school suspension	78
Alcohol use in school—2nd time	Expulsion	69
Drug use in school—1st time	Out-of-school suspension	72
Drug use in school—2nd time	Expulsion	78
Smoking in school—1st time	In-school suspension	47
Smoking in school—2nd time	Out-of-school suspension	71
Verbal abuse of teachers—1st time	Out-of-school suspension	66
Verbal abuse of teachers—2nd time	Out-of-school suspension	65
Injuring teachers—1st time	Expulsion	80
Injuring teachers—2nd time	Expulsion	92
Theft of school property—1st time	Out-of-school suspension	75
Theft of school property—2nd time	Out-of-school suspension	62
Class disturbance—1st time	Detention	67
Class disturbance—2nd time	Out-of-school suspension	68
Profanity—1st time	Detention	58
Profanity—2nd time	Out-of-school suspension	71

N=13,626

Source: Harold Wenglinsky, unpublished tabulations derived from National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88)

the security measures schools employed: Ninety-eight percent required visitors to sign in; 91 percent had a dress code forbidding what might be gang-related attire; 83 percent required hall passes; 78 percent forbade students to leave school during the day; and 78 percent banned gangs from school. There was also a relatively high degree of agreement about punishment for serious offenses. For example, 90 percent of schools expelled a student for second-time offenses in these areas: selling drugs, bringing a weapon to school, injuring a teacher, or injuring a student. And 80 percent gave out-of-school suspensions to students who injured another student or possessed or used alcohol (see Table 1).

Correlations Between Student Delinquency and Other Factors

For the purposes of his study, Wenglinsky divided discipline problems into three categories: drug offenses (use of marijuana or cocaine and binge drinking); non-serious offenses (for example, skipping class and getting "into trouble"); and serious offenses (ones that led, for example, to in- or out-of-school suspension, transfer for disciplinary reasons, or arrest).

Wenglinsky looked at student achievement and disciplinary records in eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades and correlated this information with school disciplinary policies (see Table 2). He found that twelfth-graders were more likely to be guilty of drug offenses if they had had any kind of disciplinary problems in tenth grade. There was also a positive correlation between drug offenses and being male. But Wenglinsky found that twelfth-graders who were members of minority groups were less likely than nonminority classmates to be guilty of drug offenses. And the likelihood decreased for all students if they attended schools with severe penalties for drug offenses. Wenglinsky found no correlation between socioeconomic status and drug offenses. In other words, rich, poor, and middle-class twelfth-graders in the study were equally likely (or unlikely) to be guilty of drug offenses.

When Wenglinsky looked at nonserious offenses among twelfth-graders, he again found that kids were more likely to be guilty of them if they had a history of rule-breaking in tenth grade and if they were boys. There was a greater likelihood that minority students would be guilty of nonserious offenses, but here socioeconomic status also came into play: Affluent students were more likely to commit nonserious offenses than other students.

In terms of school policies, students in schools with security arrangements such as hall passes and a ban on leaving school during the day were less likely to commit nonserious offenses. However, they were more likely to commit this type of offense if their school had a zero tolerance policy in regard to gangs.

With serious offenses, there was again a correlation between a history of rule-breaking and being a boy. Socioeconomic status was again a factor, but this time Wenglinsky found that there was also a greater likelihood that students of lower socioeconomic status would commit serious offenses. However, these of-

Table 2:
Relationship Between School Policies and School Delinquency

	Drug Offenses	Nonserious Offenses	Serious Offenses
School policies			
Punishment severity	-	-	-
Security		-	
School uniforms			
Gang Ban		+	
School Size		+	
Student characteristics			
SES		+	-
Prior delinquency	+	+	+
Minority	-	+	
Male	+	+	+

N=13,626

Source: Wenglinsky, unpublished tabulations derived from NELS:88

fenses were likely to be less of a problem in schools with discipline codes that penalized them severely.

Delinquency and Achievement

The study's findings also suggest that reducing the levels of rule-breaking will result in higher student achievement. As Table 3 shows, lower levels of student delinquency were associated with higher levels of achievement in ten out of twelve cases. Serious and nonserious offenses were negatively associated with gains in achievement between eighth and twelfth grades in all four subject areas tested—mathematics, reading, social science, and science. Drug offenses were negatively associated with achievement gains in two of the four areas—mathematics and science—but not with social science and reading. The effect sizes indicated in the table translate, roughly, into losses of 3 to 4 percentiles.

Table 3:
Relationship Between Twelfth-grade Delinquency and Academic Achievement Gains Between Tenth and Twelfth Grades

Offense	Mathematics Achievement	Reading Achievement	Social Science Achievement	Science Achievement
Drugs	-			-
Nonserious	-	-	-	-
Serious	-	-	-	-
Total effect size	.146	.155	.111	.165

N=13,626

Source: Wenglinsky, unpublished tabulations derived from NELS:88

Policy Implications

Wenglinsky's findings support the assumptions behind some policies for improving order in the classroom, but they call others into question:

- Security measures, especially those that restrict student movement, are apparently effective in reducing levels of nonserious offenses. As Wenglinsky observes, "This should not be surprising, given that most of these offenses involve students not being where they should be (late for or cutting class) and that security measures limit student opportunities to misbehave by controlling their movements during the school day."
- Security measures do not seem to have any effect on more serious offenses, such as drugs and violence, "suggesting that if students are inclined to engage in these behaviors, they can evade most security measures."
- Tough discipline codes apparently reduce serious offenses, and schools should take advantage of this fact: "A majority of schools have strict policies in place for serious offenses. A significant minority, however, do not. This analysis indicates that these less strict schools suffer from high levels of serious offenses and drug offenses and that to reduce these levels such schools need to adopt stricter policies."
- School order is closely tied to student achievement: "The consequence of student disorder is not merely more disorder; disorder also erodes the learning environment for all students as indicated by lower student achievement gains.... This finding suggests that disciplinary policy is not a side issue, distracting educators from more academic goals; rather, a sound disciplinary policy is a prerequisite for a sound academic policy."
- The study found no correlation between school uniforms and student behavior. So although school uniforms might be useful in creating school solidarity or minimizing socioeconomic differences among students, they cannot be counted on to reduce student misbehavior or delinquency.
- A policy of zero tolerance toward gangs does not seem to be effective. In the drug and serious offense categories, schools with a zero tolerance policy toward gangs did not have levels of delinquency significantly different from schools that did not have such a policy, and in the nonserious offense category, schools with the anti-gang policy had higher levels of delinquency. It should be noted that this finding does not include other zero tolerance policies.
- Finally, the notion that small schools reduce delinquency was only partially supported. Attending smaller schools, Wenglinsky found, can reduce nonserious offenses but not serious offenses or drug and alcohol use.—*Editor* □

Copies of the full report can be ordered for \$10.50 from Policy Information Center, Mail Stop 04-R, ETS, Rosedale Rd., Princeton, NJ 08541-0001; tel. (609) 734-5694; or via e-mail (pic@ets.org).

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